

The Two Koreas: Reconciliatory Efforts in Comparison with Germany

Prof. Sangtu Ko (Yonsei University)

Date: Monday, 2 February 2026

Time: 2-4 pm (NZDT)

Venue: Arts Building 206 - Room 209

Online available via Zoom

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Abstract

Germany's Ostpolitik and South Korea's Sunshine Policy are both diplomatic strategies aimed at engaging adversaries through dialogue and cooperation, though in different geopolitical contexts. Ostpolitik, initiated by West German Chancellor Willy Brandt in the late 1960s, sought to normalize relations with Eastern Bloc countries, particularly East Germany, through rapprochement, recognition of borders, and increased economic and cultural exchanges. The goal was to reduce tensions during the Cold War and pave the way for eventual German reunification, while fostering peace in Europe. Similarly, South Korea's Sunshine Policy, introduced by President Kim Dae-jung in the late 1990s, aimed at improving relations with North Korea. The policy emphasized peaceful coexistence, economic assistance, and engagement through dialogue, while avoiding confrontation. Like Ostpolitik, it sought to reduce tensions and encourage gradual change in the North's stance through cooperation and economic interdependence. Both policies faced criticism for being too conciliatory and for allegedly allowing the adversaries to exploit economic benefits without substantial political concessions. However, they both succeeded in reducing tensions and fostering dialogue. Ostpolitik played a key role in easing Cold War tensions and eventually facilitating German reunification, while the Sunshine Policy laid the groundwork for inter-Korean exchanges, though full reconciliation remains elusive.

About Prof. Sangtu Ko



Sangtu Ko is a professor emeritus of Area Studies at Yonsei University. He received his Ph.D. in Political Science at the Free University of Berlin. He has served as Chair of the Research Committee (RC42) in the International Political Science Association, Director of the Yonsei-SERI EU Center, and President of the Korean Association of Political Science and Communication (KAPSC). His main research interest is comparative politics focusing on Korea and Europe. His academic papers have been published in *Asia Europe Journal*, *International Peacekeeping*, *Pacific Focus*, and *Issues & Studies*, among others. (stko@yonsei.ac.kr)

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